NO PARLEYING

"DAD," said Winton Smith, as he came into the law office of Smith & Bronson one afternoon, "I have a chance to make some money by buying the old Erskine house at the corner of Black and Eagle streets. Ed Martin has just tipped me off that Billy Hamlin is negotiating for it to put up an apartment house. I have an hour to make a preliminary deposit of one hundred dollars to hold the option. But Billy has been a good friend to me, and I don't know whether to act on the tip or not."

"Don't act on it, then!" said his father, with unusual emphasis. "If there is a question whether a thing is right or wrong, leave it alone. The very fact that you are here for my advice in the matter proves that you're not square with your conscience, and you'd better drop the deal."

"But you don't know real estate in this town, dad!"

"I'll admit I don't, but what I want to say is that the man who begins to argue with his conscience is lost. There's no sin in being tempted. We all face that. The danger comes when a man begins to parley with wrong. You know the old saying, 'You can't prevent birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.' I believe in the validity of first impressions in the moral realm. As soon as Eve began to *argue* with the serpent the game was lost. Your best defense against a crooked act is the fact that you have to force yourself up to it. A man's conscience, if it's untampered with, has a natural antipathy to wrong, just as a horse has to fire.

"They tell me that at Washington the girls in the Treasury Department recoil from the very touch of a counterfeit bill. Your conscience ought to act that way when it scents anything shady in business. A clean thing doesn't need an excuse. The thing for which you have to make a special plea is perilous. You have to run past a danger signal somewhere before you do wrong—that is, if your conscience is functioning. The only thing to do with a temptation of this sort is to knock it down and walk over it.

"As to the question at issue on that house deal I have nothing to say. That you've got to settle with your own conscience. It makes no difference what the rules of the game say, if *your* conscience isn't sure, then for you it's dangerous. I'd rather keep my conscience sensitive than to make a lucky trade. You can't afford to sell your defense of decency for any price, and that's what you do when you try to persuade your conscience to a questionable course."

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